

Concussion

If you see a pigeon with concussion you would be forgiven if you thought – mistakenly – that it had broken its neck and that there was no hope for it. But they can make a partial recovery within 24 hours and a complete recovery in a matter of days!

In her booklet **Homeopathic Treatment for Birds**, Beryl M Chapman describes concussed birds as standing with the head hanging down between the legs, or as lying down with wings extended and with its head twisted or held against its neck. She also says that they can be found fluttering in circles with their legs dragging behind them. When I found a concussed wood pigeon she was lying on the ground, flapping ineffectually with her eyes closed. Her neck was limp.

It is important that a pigeon suffering from concussion is not out under a heat lamp or on a heat pad.

Because they have probably suffered a blow to the head they will have a bad headache and will need to be somewhere cool, quiet and dark to recover.

I placed the wood pigeon in a towel formed into a “donut” shape, so that her head was supported and the danger of food or liquid spilling from her crop and being accidentally inhaled (which would be fatal) was reduced. I was lucky to have Beryl M Chapman’s book and some homeopathic remedies, so in accordance to the book’s instructions I gave her Arnica 200, giving her one pillule, once an hour for three hours. After that I reduced to the 30th potency 4 times a day.

I mixed up some rehydration solution (1/2 pint warm water, 1/2 tablespoon Glucose (or you can use honey, or sugar) and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. I dipped her beak in the mixture without allowing the water to cover her nostrils and was surprised to find that even though she couldn’t lift her head she could sip and swallow water. She drank eagerly.

Once I had established that she could swallow I gave her a single drop of Metacam that I had for the dog, placing it at the very front of her lower beak.

During the day I kept an eye on her, making certain that she was comfortable

and that her head was propped up, dipping her beak in the rehydrating solution regularly. When I went to bed that night she was still unable to lift her head, but when I checked up on her at 2 am she was holding it in the normal position and I was able to offer her food (birdseed and defrosted peas) in a dish which I placed within easy reach of her beak. .

It took her a few days to recover her ability to stand, and then to walk and then to fly but within a week she was back to normal.

Salmonellosis /Paratyphoid

This is a bacterial infection that affects :

- the pigeon's **digestive system** causing green and slimy droppings,
- the **joints** causing them to swell and the pigeon to limp or have difficulty flying
- the **brain** causing an abscess which leads to the pigeon to twist its head and be unable to lift it from the ground.

Pigeon Paramyxovirus

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Pigeons with Pigeon Paramyxovirus will sometimes hold their heads tilted as they walk or appear to have difficulty controlling it enough to turn it the right way up, appearing to gaze at the sky (a condition referred to as stargazing) .

This is a list of the other symptoms that you could find in a pigeon with Paramyxovirus, not all affected pigeons display all the symptoms:

- Thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid
- Fine tremor of eyes or head
- Staggering
- Somersaulting in flight
- Crash landing
- Difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing.
- Tossing seed backwards
- Twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) – see photo.
- Paralysis of legs or wings
- Spiralling in flight
- Flying backwards
- Turning in circles
- Having fits
- Suddenly dropping off to sleep, head slumped forwards (zonking out!)
- Pulling head backwards towards tail.

Despite the severity of the symptoms the pigeons don't often appear to be in discomfort or ill, we tend to describe them as “otherwise well”! However, the pigeon will need to be caught in order to isolate it from other pigeons that might become infected and to give it the supportive care that it will need to survive the disease.

Pigeon PMV can damage a pigeon's nervous system. Some pigeons make a quick recovery but can have the symptoms (not the virus) return weeks or months later, some will take longer as the healing process can be very slow, others will have residual nervous symptoms for the rest of their lives and will be unreleasable.

If you decide to take a pigeon with paramyxovirus to a rescue centre or to a vet the most likely outcome is that it will be euthanased, because PPMV is an infectious disease that requires the bird to be isolated from other pigeons for at least 6 weeks and most centres don't have the resources to do that. However, there are a few rescue centres that are equipped for nursing pigeons with PMV and some will be able to offer them a permanent haven if they don't make a complete recovery.

PIGEON PARAMYXOVIRUS is a viral disease that does not affect man or animals, but a human that handles a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine can develop conjunctivitis if sensible precautions are not taken (eg, do not touch

your eyes immediately after handling a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine).

The incubation period can vary from a few days to several weeks. The most common symptoms seen by the rescuer, though only a few will be seen at the same time are : Pigeon turning in circles, difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing, tossing seed backwards, staggering, extremely watery poops, thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid, fine tremor of eyes or head somersaulting in flight, crash landing, twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) , spiraling in flight, flying backwards , having fits, walking backwards.

Some of these symptoms are found in other illnesses, **but not in the same combination**. The presence of PPMV antibodies can be established by a blood test, I would advise anyone who suspects PMV and wants this confirmed, or wants to eliminate other causes of the symptoms, to use the [Retford Poultry Partnership](#) postal testing service.

Wildlife Rescue Centres tend to diagnose PMV on a combination of symptoms, eg polyuria (passing a lot of water) and polydipsia (drinking a lot of water) without weight loss, or polyuria and nervous symptoms.

During the recovery period keep pigeons with Pigeon PMV in a quiet, warm (not hot) cage with soft flooring away from any intense light source. Provide a brick for perching.

To ensure that they are able to pick up food place seed in a deep dish so that if they stab at random they can pick seed up.

Because Pigeon PMV can cause fits pigeons are at risk of drowning but they need free access to water. Provide water (with added electrolytes if possible) in a deep narrow container to minimise the risk of accidental drowning. Watch the pigeon to ensure it is drinking.

Hand feeding may be necessary. Frozen peas and sweetcorn thawed in hot water for about 10 minutes can be hand fed as in this video.

To work out how much food a pigeon needs, weigh the pigeon and the peas...feed the pigeon 1/20 (5%) of its weight in peas **twice** a day. For

example, if a pigeon weighs 300 grams it would need 15 grams of peas and corn **twice a day**. If the pigeon is thin, or if it loses weight add a few more pieces at each feed.

If the pigeon is difficult to feed, then give the peas and corn in several small meals.

The disease runs its course in about 6 weeks, by that time the pigeon has stopped shedding the virus and won't infect other pigeons but nervous and gastro-intestinal symptoms may persist longer.

Vitamins should be given to boost the immune system. Probiotics can be used to crowd out any bad gut bacteria and electrolytes can be given to replace the electrolytes lost through polyuria (passing a lot of water).

I have found that providing a calcium supplement on arrival (Gem Calcium Syrup with Vitamin D3) has helped. The dose I gave was two drops a day for 3 days.

I have had some success treating the paralysis/stroke symptoms of Pigeon PMV using the homeopathic remedy Conium Maculatum (common hemlock) dosing with a single tablet of the 30 potency three times a day for up to 10 days. As the pilules must not be handled I find it easier to use plastic tweezers to pop them into the bird's mouth. Birds that tremble and fall over when they try to move because their balance is impaired may benefit from Argenium Nit 30 potency, one tablet given 3 or 4 times a day for up to 2 days. Belladonna can be used for birds that are restless with convulsive movement and jerking limbs. 2 pilules twice a day.

Homeopathic remedies should be given 20 minutes after food.

Pigeon PMV is highly infectious to other pigeons, victims should be kept isolated from other birds for at least 6 weeks. Maintain scrupulous hygiene, regularly disinfecting food and water containers with bleach. Always see to a pigeon with Pigeon PMV after you have treated your other birds. That reduces the risk of carrying the infection to other birds in your care.

The virus is mainly shed in the droppings and spreads in fecal dust, so make

sure you wash your hands after contact and take care not to track fecal waste or carry fecal dust to areas where other birds are. Dispose of droppings wisely, they can be a source of infection to feral pigeons.